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Who, What, Why: A Self-Reflection on the Creation and Practice of Audition Technique in the Business of Live Theatre

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Who, What, Why: A Self-Reflection on the Creation and Practice
of Audition Technique in the Business of Live Theatre

By

Kenneth Hunter Thomas

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
University Honors Scholars Program
The Honors College
University Honors Program
East Tennessee State University



April 8, 2021

Hunter Thomas.

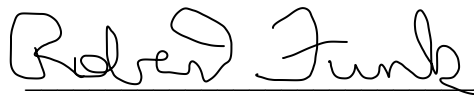
Date



April 7, 2021

Cara Harker, Thesis Mentor

Date



4/9/2021

Bobby Funk, Reader

Date

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I. Introduction

In the professional world, the interview is a crucial step to getting a job. This first impression stepping-stone is a tool used by businesses, leadership organizations, political offices, universities, and more to gain a better understanding of the candidates applying for their respective positions. These first few minutes with an individual can be vital for learning about that person's personality, work style, qualifications, and capabilities. It is also an opportunity for employers to examine how this individual will fit into the bigger picture as a team player in the company (imagining them as a piece of the puzzle if you will).

For an actor in the entertainment industry, the interview process begins with an audition. Many auditions last only a few minutes (or less), and the actor must make a positive and impactful first impression. Most actors feel that auditioning is a job in and of itself because it requires training and discipline. While the audition process is daunting, it is integral to an actor's success. Without expertise in the area of auditioning, the actor cannot reach their goal of being cast.

As a Theatre major and Dance minor and member of the University Honors Scholars program at East Tennessee State University, graduating in May 2021, I have studied various aspects of the arts and entertainment industry, attended theatre and dance workshops and conferences to meet and learn from working professionals, and worked on a number of theatrical productions ranging from large to small in both funding and sheer scale. Throughout my years of undergraduate study, I have auditioned on numerous occasions in a variety of environments and theatrical styles. In each of these auditions, new lessons revealed themselves to me which have allowed me to adapt the way in which I approach the audition process. What follows serves as a

record of my research on audition theory and my journey acquiring the skill and artistry needed to successfully navigate my way through any audition scenario.

Auditions can be a scary thing with numerous elements that are simply out of one's control. By accepting the uncontrollable elements of an audition and recognizing the aspects of an audition within their power, they can shift their focus and efforts towards what they can control, such as:

- choosing audition material that showcases their strengths,
- rehearsing and preparing their audition with dedication and discipline,
- understanding who they are as an artist and what they have to offer to a production.

Though there will still be significant failure along the way (as is the nature of artistic growth), it is my belief that these tools are the foundations to understanding the first impression and, therefore, the audition.

II. What is an Audition?

In learning about the audition, the first step is to change the understanding of what auditioning is. This understanding was changed for me when I attended a "Life After College" workshop at the South Eastern Theatre Conference Convention in the spring of 2019. Several professionals spoke on a panel, answering questions we might have about transitioning from undergrad life to the professional world and/or graduate school. Among the ideas being shared, one conversation that found the light was redefining what auditioning needed to mean to us. One of the experts leading the panel brought up the fact that, over the years, he had met many actors and actresses who claimed they hated auditions. I, being guilty of this at times, perked up at the mention of these people. He went on to explain that, as an actor, you have to learn to embrace the nervousness, fear, and frustration you have about auditions because you are going to be spending

a lot more of your time auditioning than you are rehearsing or performing. He introduced the idea that auditioning is the real job, and getting cast is simply a wonderful benefit.

When researching statistics to back up this claim, it is not difficult to find evidence supporting the idea. In 2017, the Actors Equity Association (AEA), the leading labor union for stage actors and stage managers, released their annual report of statistics involving membership, employment, and pay. In their report, it was noted that out of the 51,636 active members, only 18,422 members reported work that season, with an average weekly total of 5,816 members working. In other terms, that means that roughly 11% of all Equity members were working on any given week (DiPaola 3). Though these statistics only include actors who are members of AEA, it is not far off to infer that similar trends are found when considering non-union actors and actors pursuing television, film, and other popular media. With the understanding that a vast majority of actors are unemployed, another idea to consider is that many of the contracts these professionals are auditioning for are extremely short compared to the typical desk job. These contracts can vary in length from one day of shooting to several months of touring, but, besides some special circumstances, most all are done over the course of relatively short time periods. Bringing these factors into consideration, it is easier to grasp the life of a working actor: always auditioning and hopefully reaping the benefits.

So, what does an audition look like? Similar to interviews, different circumstances call for different environments. Some auditions are as simple as reading some sides (printed pages of a scene given to actors to audition with) in front of a casting director or two, others can be under the guise of a “cattle-call” in which large groups of actors are ushered in to perform their respective packages in front of a multitude of companies. The audition as a whole, however, can be broken down into a few sections. To keep things simple, we will break them down into the

following categories: The Wait, The Entrance, The Slate, The Performance, The Reception, and The Exit.

The Wait is simple. It could be a lobby. It could be an “on deck” chair next to a stage. It could be standing outside in the cold! Whatever it is, the reason it is important is because that is where most of the nerves set in. The nerves are important, as they remind us that we are alive and human, and because they can be channeled into our performance. The Entrance is the first chance we are seen, and it is where the power of body language and stage presence rear their heads. This may appear in the way someone walks or in the way they open a door. It is not something to be overthought, but it is something to remain aware of. The Slate is simply the introduction of ourselves. Though this sounds simple, there are plenty of directions this can go. In a cattle-call, it is typical procedure for an individual to say their name and the audition number they have been assigned. In a smaller audition setting, one may be able to get away with a more conversational “Hello, my name is Such and Such,” or a “Good morning, I am First Name Last Name.” Similar procedures can be found for auditions that are filmed to be sent online. The important aspect of the slate is that it is one of the few opportunities an actor may get to show off their personality in a way that is not filtered through a character. Smaller audition settings can allow for more of this personality to be shown off, but an actor must prepare for any environment. The most notorious category is The Performance. This is the moment of creation for the actor, the moment they get to show off their stuff. The Performance is also the category that can vary the most. One audition may ask for a monologue. Another may ask for a song. Some ask for both, while others may ask for two contrasting monologues, one classical and one contemporary. Smaller auditions and callbacks may ask for a monologue or a reading of sides from the show one is auditioning for. The variance that can occur is proof of the versatility of the

audition as a tool. It is both a moment for companies to check off boxes for things that they are searching for and for actors to present abilities that they believe signify themselves as artists. Just like an interview, it is a street that goes both ways. Our fifth category is The Reception. This category is conditional because it is not present in all auditions. Some auditions may involve the director or casting director asking the actor questions about their experience with a certain area of expertise, such as a special skill or background of knowledge. This may also be a moment for those individuals to ask the actor to try the Performance again with a small adjustment to their approach. Larger auditions typically save this moment for the callback and instead inform the actor beforehand to restate their slate. The last category is The Exit. Similar to the entrance, this is the last moment an actor has with those they are auditioning for. Whether a performance went well or not, it is important to keep one's head up high to own the work they just produced and to silently give thanks for the moment they were given to share.

And that is the audition! This is by no means an end all template, but instead a way to hopefully guide newcomers towards understanding the elements involved. Some auditions still include more elements, allowing for questions from the actor or work between more than one individual. Other auditions may include less, such as filmed auditions which have no entrance or exit from the actor and instead involve the aspect of editing. Ultimately, the audition is a tool used by hiring companies to quickly and concisely get to know their potential talent by allowing them to exhibit a small portion of their work.

III. Controllable vs Uncontrollable Factors

Now that we have a better understanding of the audition, we can begin to examine its role in the larger subject known as, "The Casting Process." The word "cast" has a few different meanings and uses within the world of entertainment. You may have heard the phrase "he/she

got cast as _____,” or “Hollywood executives are casting _____ for that upcoming movie!” You may have also heard the phrase “cast list” or “thank you to the cast and crew.” Whether it is being used as a verb or a noun, the idea of casting involves enlisting individuals to fulfill a performative role within a production or project. This can even expand outside of stage and screen to interactive roles and job descriptions which involve more than one duty, such as haunted houses, dinner theatres, or amusement park employees (i.e. “cast members” working for Disney Parks). In either case, the casting *process* is the means that a company goes about to find their cast, and/or, to cast their project. Just like the interview process, the casting process is made up of numerous elements that can affect who gets the job. I find that it is easier to understand these factors, and to take advantage of them, if they are split into two categories: Controllable Factors, those being the aspects that a candidate can make contribution towards affecting, and Uncontrollable Factors, those being aspects that are out of a candidate’s hands and have more to do with the needs of the project.

Let’s start off with the Uncontrollable Factors, as they lend to explaining the Casting Process as a whole. In every show, there are certain elements of telling the story that cannot be avoided. These are a show’s needs. For instance, there would be no story of Rapunzel if she didn’t have long hair that could be climbed upon. Therefore, if a theatre wanted to put on a production of Rapunzel, they would have to figure out some way for both the witch and the young prince to climb up the tower in a way that appears to be using her hair. This can be classified as a technical need for that show. Similarly, all shows have casting needs. Let’s say we’re putting on this production of Rapunzel, but, due to the budget of the show, only actors less than 200 lbs can safely climb Rapunzel’s “hair.” This would then be classified as a casting need for the show. As an actor, if I know I am 215 lbs on a good day, then I know that there is a *high*

chance that I will not be cast as the prince or the witch in this production of Rapunzel. This would be an Uncontrollable Factor for me at the audition, something that I cannot simply change at a moment's notice. Similarly, let's say that the show wants the witch to look older than Rapunzel and the Prince. In order to achieve this effect, they have decided that the witch must be 5'8" or taller, and that the Prince and Rapunzel must be 5'6" or shorter. Going into the audition, I know that as a 6'3" male, I would not fit any of the character descriptions, and, therefore, am likely to not get cast. This is another Uncontrollable Factor. The list can go on and on, but it is necessary to distinguish that the Uncontrollable Factor is not about what makes up the person, but in reality, what makes up the show.

It is important to note that a show's needs can change depending on the performers presented to them. This is where the Casting Director comes in. The Casting Director's job is to identify how well a performer can fit the casting needs of a particular project. At an audition, the Casting Director will watch each performer and see what boxes they check off for a particular role. For instance, if I am the casting director for a regional production of Grease premiering in July and trying to fill the role of Sandy, I know that I am going to be paying attention to females with a soprano range and Summer availability. These would be the Uncontrollable Factors for any auditionees. Now, in this production, let's say that the Costume Designer really wants Sandy to be blonde so as to reference the film. As the Casting Director, I then know that casting someone with black or brown hair (or any fun colors of the rainbow) would then mean that Sandy would need to be wigged. As the casting director, I would then hold the responsibility of deciding if Jane Doe with brown hair gives enough potential for Sandy to be worth wigging every night, as the wig would then need to be purchased, styled, and maintained. Now let's backtrack and say that the Costume designer wanted Sandy to be blonde AND did not want to

use a wig, but Jane Doe gave incredible reads for Sandy and has great chemistry with the number one candidate for Danny. As the Casting Director, I have the power to reconvene with the production team to try and convince them to go with Jane Doe, even though they would have to wig her. This is both an example of how Uncontrollable Factors can resolve themselves and how the Casting Process is indeed a process. Conversations may change the direction of a show, hard limits can become soft generalizations, and the face of a production may transform into something that was completely unexpected. These aspects are further complicated by the aspect of who takes on the role of casting director. For small theatres and films, the hat can be worn by resident staff, show directors, or sometimes the stage managers of productions. For larger TV networks and production companies, the title is a payroll in itself because of the amount of work that needs to be done for the project. The person at the table can and will change, which can open up opportunities that may not have been expected because of the contribution of a new individual's perspective. These considerations are why an actor must remain aware of the uncontrollable factors but, ultimately, cannot allow themselves to be controlled by them.

One tool that these Casting Directors use to help them in casting is a concept called "type." One's "type" is the kind of roles they would get cast in at face value. Some examples of this include leading man, romantic lead, the best friend, boy/girl next door, the villain, the innocent one, etc. These types are informed by one's physical features, such as hair, eyes, height, weight, musculature, and frame, as well as by the way one carries themselves, such as the way they walk, the way they talk, the gravity of their smile, the space they take up in the room, their posture, and their facial expressions. Type is something that can be played into, such as casting the conventionally attractive person in the popular crowd for a high school drama, as well as played against, such as casting the same conventionally attractive person as the killer in a new

horror movie. For both the actor and the director, type is something that can and should be taken advantage of and/or upended. In other words, “type” can be used or ignored. Earlier, I mentioned that a distinction needed to be made about Uncontrollable Factors, in that they are more about the show and less about the individual. I say that because ultimately, a show’s needs are their needs, and to spend time trying to fit oneself into a box instead of embracing their individuality is simply wasteful. To bring up an earlier example, the Jane Doe who got cast as Sandy already had the essence of Sandy, it was just up to the Casting Director to decide if they wanted to go in that direction or not. A healthy balance must be found by each and every actor between what is seen and what can be done. Once this balance is found, they can really take control of their Controllable Factors.

In this instance of communicating Controllable Factors, I am splitting them up into three categories, those being Type, Craft, and Voice. As we have just learned, type is what is seen for face value. It is also what can be played into and against. As an actor, this is important because we have to remain self-aware of our physical self because it informs our acting choices just as much as our training does. Craft is the training. It is the talent that we possess and work so hard to hone and grow. It is every workshop and every masterclass, as well as every college elective and major requirement. Craft is the culmination of knowledge that an actor has stored in themselves that they can then turn around and use to create life onstage. To put it simply, an actor’s craft is their ability to do, both for themselves and their audience. Lastly, there is Voice. Voice in this context is better put as what one has to say. It is the perspective we each bring into the room and the voice we implement into our daily lives. There are many arguments over what art is, but that is not what this is about. This is about connecting with others, in a way that justifies doing art. As I have said before, these concepts may be confusing at first. However, I

think that all three of these aspects can be better understood when looking at a subject. To assist in that, we will be breaking down, myself, Hunter as the subject, examining my type, my craft, and my voice, to better understand and convene about the Controllable Factors in the Casting Process.

IV. Who: What is my Type?

In exhibiting the type(s) I identify and audition with, I feel it is necessary to start back with the beginnings of my theatre journey so as to follow the logic that I have used to find my own type. Though type is heavily based on how other people view the actor, it is also affected by the “isms” that a person has in the behavior. In following that logic, the way an individual has grown up in the theatre and out will also affect their type. Did they have a confident knack for things onstage? Were they shy at first or thrown in the back in more than one show? Did they find theatre later in life and bring a set of life skills that may not have been found behind the curtain? From a psychological standpoint, the journey someone has taken as a person, not just as an actor, will make up the elements by which we define type just as much as, and sometimes, even more than, their height or face shape. In fact, the stereotypes and biases that we as a society have about other people based on the way they look is one of the reasons type exists. Looking back at old Hollywood for example, it is easy to find a pattern in the type of casting for romances, comedies, and action films. Take Clayton Moore for instance. His casting on the *Lone Ranger* set forth a path of how the directors viewed a hero of the wild west: strong and handsome with a square jaw (Moore 1956). In comparing the hero of that point in time to the heroes of today, he bears a striking resemblance to Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, and even some to Henry Cavill, all of which play superheroes in films today (Evans 2011, Hemsworth 2011, Cavill 2013). Though society has made some progress towards more inclusivity in both storytelling and

representation since then, it is still a bias that we as human beings play into (whether consciously or not). It is with the hope of casting now and forward that we become more conscious of these types of biases and how they might be used in a positive manner of progression.

With that in mind, let's take a look at how I caught the theatre bug before examining my resume and finding the connection between roles now. Growing up, you couldn't find me without a book in my hand. I was the type of kid who was always about their studies, always brought a book to recess, and was always reading and watching. Looking back, I think that I had much more interest in the infinite possibilities of magic and superheroes that could be found by turning the page than by the game of football going on in the field by the playground. Though this had some great advantages in early literacy and worldly knowledge, it also came with the disadvantage of overconfidence in the classroom and a cut and dry personality. At just ten or twelve years old, I took myself about as seriously as someone who had just recently finished their PhD in Philosophy with a focus in Worldly Studies graduating top of their class at Harvard. And if you're laughing at how big of a head I had, it's absolutely okay, trust me, I am too as I write this. To sum myself up without putting myself down *too* much, I thought I had the world figured out because I had myself figured out (to a degree). I thought the world was pretty black and white which led to a surprising amount of cynicism for a fourth grader. As you can imagine, this wasn't exactly a great setup for my teenage years. By the time I was halfway through junior high, I was starting to realize that the world wasn't as simple as I initially thought. I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, and I definitely wasn't as funny or athletic as the guys and gals around me. The defining factors about me were that I was the tallest in my class, I was heavier than the other kids, and (at the time) I could play the trumpet. This led to, again, a surprising amount of introspection for a seventh grader. I started to secretly question the religion I had been brought

up in, began to realize that I was gay, and found myself in an existential dread with only one considerable escape—suicide. Now, you may be wondering, what does this have to do with type? Well, this setup is relevant towards the first play that I ever performed in (besides my heart-wrenching performance as baby Jesus in my church’s nativity scene when I was less than a year old). In my eighth-grade year, Thomas Hawtin was hired on as the new drama teacher at my school. With him he brought a fall production of *James and the Giant Peach* in which I played both James’s father and The Ship Captain. Now this was great for me because James’s parents have a terrifying scene at the start of the show where they get eaten by a giant rhinoceros and The Ship Captain has a scene where the sheer awesomeness of seeing a whale-sized peach tethered in the sky by seagulls causes his crewmates to tie him below deck by reason of insanity. Imagine my thrill at learning I was given the opportunity, no, the responsibility of exhibiting death and exploring the limits of mental illness all in front of the whole school and my family! And of course, all of this casting had to do with my broad knowledge of the world, and nothing to do with the fact that I was taller than everyone else and could more easily play an adult onstage.

In jesting, I hope to explain a point. Though the clear reason I was cast as the “adult” roles in this production was because I was taller than everyone else, I believed it was because I could handle darker material. So, when I was cast as Rapunzel’s Prince the next semester in our production of *Into the Woods Jr.* my portrayal became less about a prince who was prettier than he was sharp, and more about a man who has his eyes gouged out by thorns in trying, and failing, to save his love from a tower. The thing I believed about myself, and therefore, my character, dictated the choices I made. Clear cut, black and white. And although I had a new spark for life

as an individual who had just found the joy of the spotlight, I had a lot of lessons to learn before becoming the actor I am today (albeit, an actor who still has many, many lessons to learn).

Now, before arriving at my resume, I want to share one more point about my training that helps define who I am as an actor at this moment in time. It is training that I will always be thankful for, no matter how much it was unenjoyable at times. Once I got to high school, my outlet for theatre became less conventional than some would imagine. I went from doing fun, fantasy filled shows to doing four years of...speech and debate. Surprised? So was I. In the transition from eight to ninth grade, I discovered that our high school participated in a program called Forensics. Without going too far into detail, Forensics (also known as Speech and Debate) is a competitive organization for public speaking, debate, and speech writing where students participate in monthly tournaments throughout the school year. I lucked out in that there were also acting based events where the point was less about how well you could write and present a speech, and more about how well you could dissect a script, a series of poems, or a cutting of prose and perform it in a way that calls attention to an argument made by the author(s). As an aspiring actor, this was great for two reasons. First, you got to decide what you wanted to perform. You could cast yourself as anyone, put together the story that you wanted to share, and bring attention to any issue that you felt important (within reason for a high schooler at least). This was a pro in that it wasn't just fun, it also helped myself, and countless others, discover a voice that they didn't realize they had. The second reason was either a dream or a nightmare depending on your experience with acting. Because the idea of the competition was speech centered, and to level the playing field for those with less budget than others, there were no costumes, and there were limited props and set. Everyone wore formal attire such as suits and pantsuits, and the events that allowed props and set only allowed one per actor. This meant that,

if you were playing a 75 year-old man battling with cancer, there was no hospital gown or age makeup to help you sell the role. You had to find whatever it was in your physicality and voice that would make us believe that you were truly a 75-year old man battling cancer. It was Elephant Man level exploration for kids anywhere from 13-18. To build on this, some pieces required more than one character, so that meant you could play anywhere from 5 to 30 people within an 8-10-minute span. It was incredible training, and a great way to discover the walls you needed to break down for yourself as a performer. In my journey of type, I was lucky to have this type of experience so early in my training because I wasn't bound by anything in my own casting besides my sex, my race, and my preference for a script. I was a tall, heavy-set guy who felt awkward and out of place, especially being one of the few out gay people at my school. In the world of Forensics, I could be anything I wanted to be which allowed for growth as a performer and as a person. Though type was something that existed and we could play into or against, it wasn't something we had to worry about as much at the time. The focus was the script, not the individual.

With that lengthy digression over with, let's look at my resume.

Hunter Thomas

Actor

(423) 802-6680
hunterthomas145@gmail.com

Height: 6'4" Baritone/Tenor
Hair: Brown Eyes: Blue



REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

Professional Theatre:

<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	Shepherd	Tecumseh! Outdoor Drama	Lance Mekeel
<i>Tecumseh!</i>	Soldier/Frontiersman	Tecumseh! Outdoor Drama	Brent Gibbs
<i>Front Page News</i>	Sue Hicks	Rhea County Scopes Festival	Jim Crabtree

Educational Theatre:

<i>You Can't Take It With You</i>	Tony Kirby	East Tennessee State University	Bobby Funk
<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	Colonel Brandon/Gossip	East Tennessee State University	Herb Parker
<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>	Master of Ceremonies	East Tennessee State University	Cara Harker
<i>The Flick</i>	The Dreaming Man/Skylar	East Tennessee State University	Patrick Cronin/Evin McQuiston
<i>What I Want To Say But Never Will</i>	Various Roles	TN Governor's School for the Arts	Helana Kays

Film:

In Quarantine	Dancer	Student Film	Cara Harker
bibliotheque	Dancer	Student Film	Cara Harker/Taylor Hutchison

TRAINING

B.A. Theatre with Minor in Dance from East Tennessee State University
 -Honors College: University Honors Scholar (Expected Graduation 5/8/2021)
Society of American Fight Directors Pass in Unarmed and Single Sword, 2019

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Tap Dance, Aerial Dance, Dance Improvisation, Strong Mover and Physical Actor, Stage Combat, Novice Bullwhip, Comfortable On and Around Horses, Strong Swimmer and Climber, Dialect Work (RP, Australian, Southern Appalachia, German), Juggling (Balls, Rings, Clubs, Knives), Vocal Training, Knowledge of LAX and Soccer, Experience with Weight Sharing and Contact Improv, Knowledge of Power Tools and Sewing Techniques, TN Driver's License, U.S. Passport.

It is somewhat a representation of where that training left off, and where my experiential training began. Looking over my resume, some patterns can be found that may inform things

about me as a performer. First off, when looking at the shows I have been in, what do you see? I see some classic stories ranging from Shakespeare to literature (*The Winter's Tale*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk*), some shows that, even if I was not familiar with them, invoke some excitement in the name (*Tecumseh!*, *You Can't Take It With You*, and *Front Page News*), and some titles that have some intrigue to them (*The Flick*, *WIWTSBNW*, *In Quarantine*, and *bibilothèque*). As a viewer, though I may not recognize every show, I can recognize that there is some range in style that this actor has. Looking at the roles, what can be inferred? Seeing two dance roles tells me that this actor is at least somewhat of a mover (this is even more informed by the SAFD certifications under Training and some of the special skills under Related Experience). If I didn't know any of the titles, the two military roles inform me that this performer may have experience giving vulnerability in the face of danger or strength for the cause of duty. Being more familiar with the titles, a casting director may recognize the comedy and romance necessary for roles like Tony Kirby, or the range of physicality and emotion needed to play a role as old as the Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale*. Even with roles such as Master of Ceremonies and Sue Hicks, so much is said in just a name. "What kind of gusto would someone need to earn the title Master of Ceremonies?" "Sue Hicks sounds like a real country bumpkin, I wonder if he could play Curly in Oklahoma?" Another really clear clue for my type is to look up at the top where my descriptors are. Just from knowing I'm 6'4", it's pretty clear that I'm not playing a munchkin in the Wizard of Oz.

Another indicator towards type is the headshot. Jenna Fischer, also known as Pam from *The Office*, describes how headshots are more than just a great picture of you in her book *The Actor's Life: A Survival Guide*. She mentions that headshots need to give five clear descriptors of who the person is. These descriptors need to be as specific as possible because they inform the

casting director of the type you could play before you even start your audition. Take a look at the headshot at the top of my resume for instance. What are five descriptors you get about me when looking at the picture? When I look at it, I get friendly, enthusiastic, fun, helpful, and caring. Though these descriptors could be a little more specific on my part, they inform that this actor could play the excited best friend, the inspiring leader, the guy next door, the lovable teacher, or the young entrepreneur. I love this headshot because those are all roles I know I could play, but it's not my only headshot. Here is another example of a headshot I use. From this headshot, five descriptors I would use are confident, knowing, cool, handsome, and sharp. Really different from



the first headshot, right? My smile from the first picture has turned more into a smirk, nothing too cocky, but still full of fun secrets ranging from a prank to a compliment. My hair has become something more reminiscent of a Disney Prince than a kooky best friend, and my endearing eyes have a lot more knowledge behind them now. The crazy thing is, these were taken on the same day with the same wardrobe and hair. As actors, if we know that the role we are going out for is a specific type and we are trying to play into or against that, we might use a headshot that correlates with descriptors of the

character. With this headshot, I would go out for roles such as the leading man, the older brother,

the knowing business-man, the playful prankster, or the aspiring artist. If the description for a character was “creepy older male with a skeleton in his closet,” I might want to use a different headshot than these two for my audition. At the moment, because most of my auditions are cattle-call based with a large number of companies, I like to present this headshot as my “acting” headshot on the back of my resume and my smaller headshot as my “employee” headshot. Not everyone does this, and some even warn against it. Some people recommend printing them back to back on the same sheet of paper, while others say to staple them so they can be torn apart and looked at the same time. These are a few examples of choices that actors have to make on the business side of things to prep for their audition. Manageable now, but predetermined once your headshot has been submitted to the casting director.

There is a saying in theatre that once you know your type, it’s already changed. This is in reference to the fact that, as actors, our type is constantly changing. One day you’re the young ingenue, the next you’re the cool teacher, the next you’ve turned around and you’re playing someone’s mother in a Sarah Ruhl play. There’s nothing wrong with this at all and, in fact, it’s a great thing for actors. We would be remiss if Meryl Streep or Maggie Smith were limited to young roles their entire careers, and many girls would be out of the job because these two would be working so often! On a more serious note, there are so many stories that aren’t centered around a young couple in their twenties which need to be told, and we need actors who can play above thirty and forty and fifty to play them! Actors such as André De Shields have had expansive careers throughout their life, and through that their type has changed many, many times. Age is not the only thing that can cause your type to change. Weight, hairstyles, musculature, and life experience are all predetermined factors in the audition room which can change over time. I am no exception to this. When I graduated high school in 2017, I weighed

311 lbs and was sporting a round, full face and XXXL clothes. Shortly after my graduation, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder called Hashimoto's disease, an illness in which your immune system attacks your thyroid, causing it to underproduce the hormones needed to regulate various systems throughout the body (metabolism, digestion, etc.). Through an ultrasound of my thyroid, it was discovered that my thyroid had been severely damaged overtime putting it at about 50% working capacity (a rough estimate from my endocrinologist). Once medicated, I started to drop pounds like never before. Combined with training in dance, aerial silks, and stage combat, I've gone through a body transformation that I didn't think was possible. Coming in at a somewhat muscular 225lbs nowadays, my type has been completely overhauled. Now, allow me to state this clearly: the type I had before could have found a full-fledged career as an actor. As stated before, type change is not a bad thing. It's as much a part of the cycle of an actor's life as aging or getting married. With change comes new challenges and priorities. I went through a change in type, and now I have to adapt accordingly. This means different roles to keep an eye out for, different headshots I may try to meet, and different skills to try and supplement my resume with. Whatever type(s) someone is, it is simply something to acknowledge and move on. Ultimately, our training is what will get us the job, type is just a tool to inform our choices.

V. What: What is my Craft?

Every artist has a unique story of their training. Just like the sculptor who started out finger painting in grade school, our training stories are almost always intertwined with the stories of how our artform peaked our interest. I have yet to meet an actor who didn't have some form of a relationship with musical theatre, SNL, action movies, or dramatic literature before they started their "formal" training. The phrase "caught the drama bug" is even more accurate than some

would think because for most individuals with a passion for professional creativity, the art finds us, not the other way around.

At the beginning of type, I gave a glimpse into how I became involved with acting and the theater. So, in talking about my technique, I can't begin to explain the way in which I came to understand what it means to do without going deeper into how my relationship with "playing" became so important to me that I felt it necessary to hinge my livelihood on it. As we reviewed before, I got the opportunity to join my first play because a theatre program was started at my school in my eighth-grade year. However, I only focused on why the role was so exciting for me and never mentioned why I auditioned for the play in the first place.

My favorite way to start off the story of how I got into theatre is by taking things way back to the early 2000's when I was in early elementary school. Being at the tail end of the Millennial generation and the beginning of Generation Z, my adolescence was a mixture of media ranging from *Hey Arnold* to *Drake and Josh*. Whereas most 90's kids have fond memories of their version of SNL, *All That*, me and my younger sister were massive fans of another sketch comedy show: *The Amanda Show*. For anyone unfamiliar, *The Amanda Show* was a sketch comedy show in which a young Amanda Bynes, Drake Bell, Josh Peck, and other teen actors performed in several reoccurring sketches and characters such as Judge Trudy, Blockblister, and When "____" Attack. The show had plenty of rewatchability and received great reviews for the three seasons it was produced. Ironically, my main interest was actually in being one of the kids in the studio's live audience, not playing the iconic characters (whom I actually thought were all real individuals at the time). My journey into theatre started with me discovering from my mother that I couldn't be a part of the show because I lived in East Tennessee and the show filmed in Hollywood, California. See, a large part of my personality is that I don't like being told

I can't do something. It's not an aspect of lacking ability or a perspective of wanting to prove disrespect, I have just always found the phrase, "because that's the way things are" as a wonderful challenge. And, as far as I can remember, learning that I lacked the opportunity to participate in a large part of society because I lived in a small town was the first time I had been challenged in this way.

Now granted, this part of me comes as both a blessing and a curse, revealing itself in ways that line up with other aspects of my personality. For instance, I have a mind that races at 100mph. It is something that can aid me when I can focus it in the right direction, and something that can overwhelm me if I let it run rampant. On the upside of things, I can learn pretty quickly if I can establish a formula for whatever I am working on. It also lends its hand at logic because I've always been able to connect the dots quickly when presented with the right information. This worked its way into my feeling of being challenged because I began to establish that nothing is just "the way things are," but, instead, it is either a stone unturned or a journey just started. As a kid, this actually left me with a lot of hope about my future, in contrast to the previous telling of my existentialist childhood. In reality, I was just as much weighed down by the negative qualities of my brain as I was raised up by the upward perspective. Because I had this need to figure things out, I carried around a large amount of social anxiety stemming from the complex nature behind humanity. My heart raced at the thought of other people examining my behavior the way I examined theirs and, by the time I started to go through puberty, I was dreadfully self-aware of myself. My situation was complicated in that I was a budding queer raised under a southern Baptist roof. Conflicting messages of self-assurance and self-critique were constantly ringing in my ears, and I began to realize that I would not find answers in the church any more than I would rereading my favorite series about a boy with a lightning bolt scar.

I'm not going to say that these thoughts were as articulated then as they are now, but the search for who I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do was a driving force behind my young self. For a long time, I thought that that would be in the field of math and science as its laws and equations came pretty naturally and I was under a constant reminder that it would pay the bills. However, when the audition sheet for that play went up on the corkboard outside the cafeteria, the only explanation I can find is that it was the first time I had felt invited instead of challenged. I didn't have to audition for that play, but something in me told me it was a shot worth taking. I'm grateful for it every day.

So now that we have an even deeper grasp of the circumstances in which I started in the theatre, let's fast forward a bit to my high school speech and debate career. The main lessons I learnt in middle school drama were bigger is better and don't play with other people's props (especially ones that are rented). My high school forensics teacher, Lucy Boydston, was and is one of the most challenging directors I have worked with. She knows how to push her students to greatness and doesn't accept anything but their best. Though this sometimes came with some tears (as acting is a very dangerous game), it also consistently came with growth and mutual understanding of each other. She has something that is very difficult to teach: an eye for truth. It is a talent that I couldn't quite identify back then, but the more I grow as an actor, the more I recognize how special a gift like that is. The most important lesson she taught me (among many great ones that I didn't comprehend until later) was the importance of perspective. In many acting techniques and theories, this is a word that can be used in different contexts or situations. However, what I find is most important for any young actor to note is that perspective provides information and information informs choice. What does that mean? Well, let's take an example. Two people walk into a room. One hands the other a sealed cardboard box, then the other leaves

the room. Vague? Absolutely, but it paints a picture to work from. Let's pretend that you are the individual receiving the box. Now, imagine that today is your birthday and that the room you have just walked into is your mother's kitchen. The box she hands you is sealed with wrapping paper because it is a gift for you on your special day. This certainly changes the circumstances, right? I'm sure you feel elated to receive a gift, thankful to your mother, and curious to see what is in the box. It gives you something really specific to imagine and provides a much more interesting story for the audience for a few reasons, but I'll get back to that. Now, let's keep every aspect the same, except that the person handing it to you is your boss. How does that change your reaction to the box? I'm sure you are still curious as to what's inside, but you may also be asking yourself, "Why is my boss in my mother's kitchen?" and/or "Where is my mother right now?" Let me change it one more time for you. Imagine that all of the circumstances are the same as the first example except, now, you are the one handing off the box. How does that change the circumstances? Could it be that you share a birthday with your mother and that you want to surprise her before she surprises you? Or could this be a gift from someone you don't particularly like and she has agreed to take it out of your sight? Whatever the circumstances may be, they give lots of information that change how you feel and behave in the situation.

Ultimately, this perspective could be used with numerous examples. The box could be a small one outlined with suede because someone is proposing to another. It could be that a daughter is moving to college and a father is giving her the last box of her belongings before she drives away. Perhaps it is even a locked safe being handed off from one burglar to another. Whatever the situation is, the perspective of each individual is changed depending on what is referred to as the given circumstances. When I started to more formally study acting, I was introduced to this idea and got a little lost in the grand scheme of the play. Though the given circumstances from

one character to another does shift, I found perspective to be more helpful for myself when starting out because it made me think less analytically about the scene I was in. When working on projects now, I refer to these ideas as the given circumstances (and will continue to refer to things that way as I continue this discussion of technique), but I thought it would be helpful to introduce things that way so as to make things a bit more personal. Another term we use instead of personal is “specific.” The more specific the situation we are playing to, the easier it is for us, and the audience, to understand the situation that is being played out and, therefore, to connect with.

I discovered one great example of this while reading *Year of the King: An Actor's Diary and Sketchbook* by Antony Sher. The book is a published journal of the year leading up to Antony's premiere as the titular role in *Richard III* with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Way before even accepting the role, Sher was already planning out how he could create a Richard that was different from what was done before, examining the play from a literary standpoint so he could play against some of the typical features of the text. Knowing that the play is typically presented as a black comedy of sorts, Sher wanted to take a closer look at the darker tendencies of the play which are typically presented in irony. One of the most famous aspects of the play is the unspecified physical deformity that Richard has lived with since birth. The generalized aspect of his handicap has been a subject of both inspiration and deterrence, spurring a devilish dance between the visual sense of weight in the character and the actual fatigue that comes with such a physical transformation for the actor. For Sher, as well as for any actor, the sculpting of this character was further challenged by the layers that make up his personality. Early on in his book, Sher was keeping his eyes and ears open to the possible connections he could make in his daily

life to that of King Richard III. Here is a moment in the text where one of those discoveries is shared in such a way that clearly denotes his thinking process.

I find myself drifting in and out of the conversation (over dinner at a restaurant). Images from a recent television programme which featured interviews with Belfast teenagers, boys of about fifteen with puffy eyes and shorn heads. The first thing that struck you was that they didn't behave like other adolescents in front of a camera, they didn't blush or try

to show off; they just talked very openly about death and looting, setting fire to buildings or cars. 'It doesn't matter,' they kept saying, in those accents which are themselves like blades held gently against your cheek.

'Why not?' persisted the well-trained, well-spoken BBC investigative reporter.

'Cause we've grown up with it. It's what we know' — which could be Richard III talking. He's grown up in a period of fierce civil war, the Wars of the Roses, and has never known anything else. It seems very important this. Growing up watching street battles, people being maimed, yet another funeral passing. It takes character out of the Hammer Horror world of ghouls, away from the Mickey Mouse words like Evil, and towards something that is recognizable. (Sher 41)

As you can see, inspiration can find itself in many ways. For Sher, this moment of inspiration provided insight into the person he was painting the picture of. For me, this moment of inspiration was also insight into the connection between the artist and their audience. One of my favorite metaphors for acting (and for theatre) is to make connections between it as a performance art and painting as a visual art. I am not a painter myself, but I have always been amazed by the power that the canvas has to evoke emotion. I will forever remember the first time I saw a large-scale neoclassical painting in person (*Venus, Wounded by Diomedes, is Saved by Iris* by Joseph-Marie Vien (1775)) at the Columbus Museum of Modern Art. The way the light bounced off Venus, it was as if she was glowing right in front of me, borderline indescribable. Art like that, it's something everyone deserves to see. I compare it to acting because it helps to hit home to importance of specificity in performance. Every choice we make on stage, from the way we walk to the way we say hello, is a brush stroke. The research before-hand and the

connections made between actor and character to understand their situation, is the gathering of all the colors and mediums to create the painting live onstage in front of the audience. The speed at which our eyes dart with distrust. The pain in our voices at the climax of a monologue. The bubbling of laughter when we share moment of relief. All of it is a result of the tedious detail work that comes with acting. The metaphor can even go further when looking at the style of theatre to the style of art. In campier work like musical theatre and ironic comedies, there is a sense of self-awareness and pointing the finger at the self. In more abstract work, the lines are not drawn as clearly and more is left up to the imagination to fill in the blanks yourself. In hyper-realistic work, sometimes I find myself trying (and struggling) to find inaccuracies because of the amazing detail that is put in. One constant, however, remains clear. The clearer the picture I have as the actor, the clearer the picture I paint for the audience. Sometimes, in performance, from stroke one we are able to tell the types of people onstage (remember type?). Other times, it is not so clear, possibly with intention from the director.

This connection between the artist and the audience is one that is crucial to auditions. Though there is lots of strategy that comes with audition prep, when it comes down to the wire, I have heard it said more than once to “just do the fucking play.” In less crude terms, this means to perform your monologue at an audition in the same truthful way you would for an audience. As surprising as it may seem, casting agents want you to get the job as much as you do, because that means that they’ll have found the right person! In order to do this however, actors have to shed some of the nervousness they might have (referencing back to the deep breath we recommend to take right before we start) so they can gain a better focus of their objective before starting. With this objective, an actor can perform in a small office or a large business center as if this was their opening night on Broadway. As crazy as it seems, the magic of theatre is enormously due to the

ability to harness that suspension of disbelief and hone into the truth right where it lies. Let's take a look at how I have done that with some previous monologues I have used for auditions.

Though I have been through numerous auditions, each involving different environments and levels of success, it wasn't until I started auditioning for graduate programs in acting (and subsequently, documenting those auditions for my thesis) that I began to understand and embrace some elements of the audition. If type is the "Who am I?" and voice is the "Why am I doing this?" (more on that later), then technique can be described as "What am I doing?" And trust me, there's a lot to do. In taking a closer look at how I have developed a process of prepping for an audition, I will be describing the selection process for a piece, the book work done for that piece, and the rehearsal process for it, followed by a brief conversation of self-awareness in the audition and callback room.

It may come surprisingly, but one of the most difficult parts of putting a piece together is finding one to begin with! Monologues can be pulled from play scripts, movies, monologue books, and sometimes websites that publish them specifically for auditions. I even heard some advice from Michael Legg (former Artistic Director at Actor's Theatre Louisville) that a monologue can be stitched together from a section of dialogue if the writing is good enough. Wherever a monologue is pulled from, there are a few elements to weigh before working on the piece. 1. Is this monologue active/will I be fighting an uphill battle to make it active? There are a lot of monologues that have beautiful imagery and tell gorgeous stories, but those don't tend to do as well at auditions. The reason for this is because "story" monologues tend to be one-note because the goal for the character is to tell a story or to communicate an idea, an objective that is not typically very high stakes or engaging (at least, without the stakes of the play or movie they came from). This leaves the actor with less tools to seek out their objective with which, in turn,

becomes less interesting/engaging for the audience. In reference to the brushstroke metaphor I mentioned, there are plenty of beautiful paintings which can be described as “simple yet beautiful” or “exactly as you see it.” In the case of auditions, we want paintings that keep you looking and wanting more. This can be because of enormous detail, like my previously mentioned painting, or this can come from an interesting choice of style, like a Van Gogh or a Warhol. In either case, the thing that makes these pieces interesting is the setup the monologue gives for that person to exhibit the beats, rhythms, choices, and thought process of a character. Now, I should say, this can absolutely be done with a story monologue, it just may be a bit harder to implement a subtextual story in the room, so the actor is fighting uphill a little bit more unless they have a concrete enough objective. Some actors are able to take advantage of this by showcasing their ability to exhibit dimension in a character. The important thing in choosing this kind of monologue is to be aware of the *risks* involved.

Personally, my method of finding monologues varies depending on what I am looking for. When I am searching for monologues, I have had more luck searching for pieces that involve themes of love. This is due to both the depth of the search pool and the familiarity I have with diving into the subject.

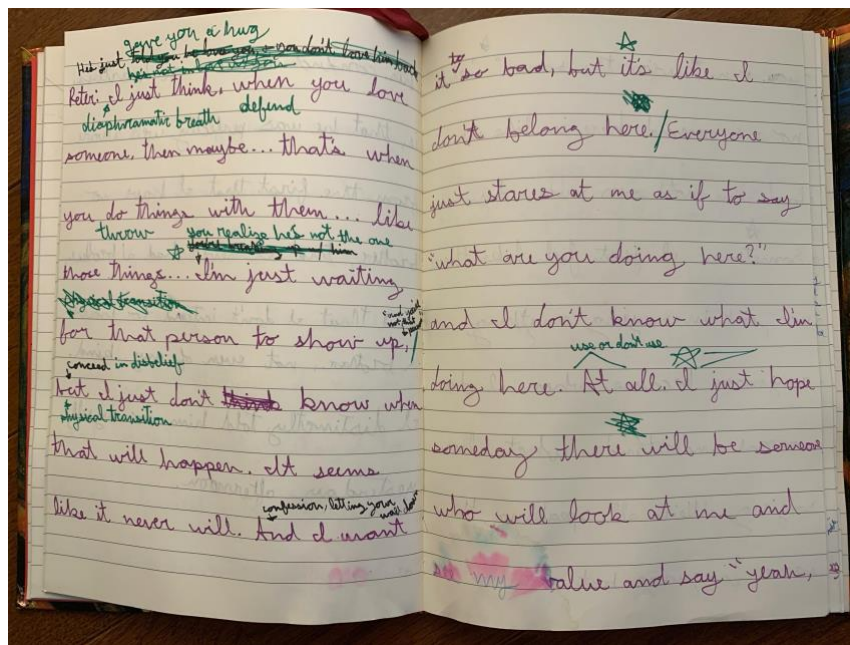
Firstly, in this battle of story monologues vs action monologues, I have found that action monologues are less difficult to find when you have a better idea of the scene you are trying to set, or, the type of interaction you are inspired by. With the plethora of breakups and confessions of affection that have been explored over time, there is plenty of material to search through that is set in plenty of action. For me, there is less difficulty finding writing that you can use and connect with because love is such a universal theme, so maybe I have had more luck with these

kinds of monologues because it is more likely that a talented writer has already opened up their heart into a 60 second cutting.

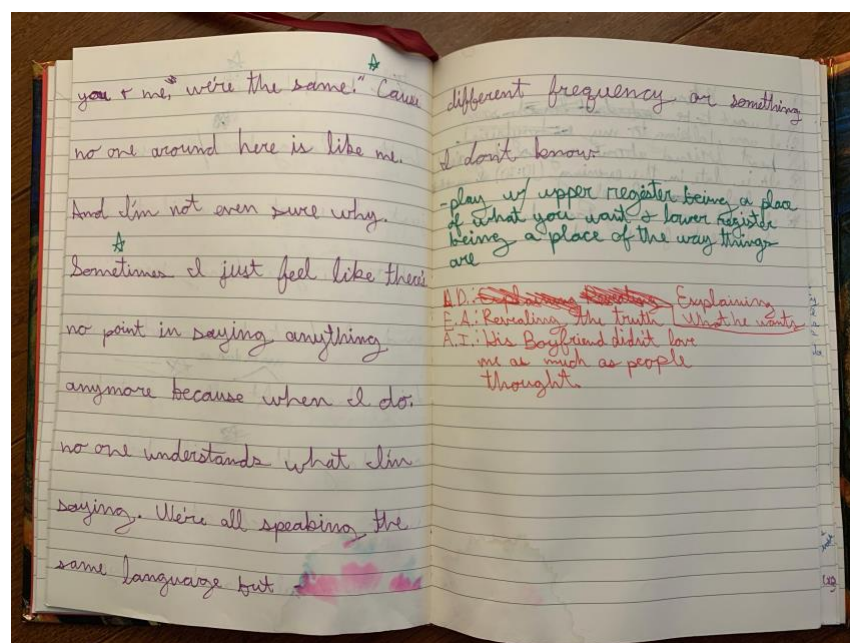
The other reasoning for using monologues about romance is closely connected to the universality of the theme itself. Everyone has experienced some form of attraction to another individual, whether it be a schoolyard crush, a long marriage, or a rocky set of dates that didn't work out in the end. From a logical standpoint, this gives clearer direction to the audience as to what is happening in a scene and, therefore, allows you to have more freedom of choices once the scene is setup because, similar to type, you can either play into or against a trope. From an emotional standpoint (and, really, the larger reason for why I drift towards these monologues), I have a multitude of complicated feelings to pull from when workshopping monologues on the subject. As a gay man in the early 21st century, I walk in a world of transition and assumption. The experience of a gay man born in the 1960's is wildly different from my experience being born in the late 1990's, which is wildly different from a gay man being born this year. This is due in part to the treatment we each experience from family and friends, as well as the outlook we have for ourselves based on the representation we see in media and leadership. Additionally, there are the experiences of those navigating other viewpoints on the spectrums of sexuality, sex, gender, and race. I am but one perspective (frankly, a very privileged one). It's a complicated path to navigate, which I think is why I pull so much of my inspiration from it.

Once I have found a monologue and know that I want to work on it, the first thing I do before anything else is write it down in my journal. Part of this is ritualistic, as it gets me into the headspace of developing a piece and making it my own, and the other part is functional. Typically, when you find a monologue, there is not very much room to make notes and display thoughts around the page, so, having a physical notebook to do this can be extremely helpful.

Here is an example of some notation I have made on one of the monologues I have worked on in the past. This monologue is from a short play titled *Three Cheerleaders Cheering for the Worst Team in the History of High School Sports* by Adam Szymkowicz (and, as you can see, it is has taken a beating since I first transcribed it). First things first, I copy the monologue over from wherever I found it from, typically leaving two spaces in between every line so as to leave plenty of space for note taking.



From there, I will read through the monologue out loud a few times, taking notes indicating beats, tone shifts, inner dialogue, options for cuts, and actions I want to explore in pursuing certain objectives. This



part of the rehearsal process is often referred to as “book work.” The script is still in hand in this phase as we are still deciphering the clues the playwright has left for us. Some of these clues may

include punctuation, word choice, repetition of ideas, imagery, where the monologue starts, and where the monologue ends (to name a few). These “clues” that the playwright has left are indications towards how they view the character and the moment that is being played. Some actors are religious about using these clues to forge their performance, while others may just use the words alone and create a performance that derives itself from their own imagination, using the words as simply stepping-stone to arrive at the destination they created for themselves. The wonderful thing about auditions is that either is acceptable, especially with contemporary works. Now, granted, changing the context of the speech will be more difficult the more famous the speech is, but the point being that, at the audition, the casting director just wants to see you act. However you do that is up to you and your abilities to create a character a character and pursue an objective.

There is a certain point in doing bookwork where our familiarity with the scene takes us by the hand and stands us up out of our chairs. It is a point in the rehearsal process where the bookwork is not finished, but we know the scene well enough to answer the questions seven questions.

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- What time is it?
- What do I want?
- Why do I want it?
- How will I get what I want?
- What must I overcome to get what I want?

These questions originate from Constantin Stanislavski, creator of the “Stanislavski System” and author of the book *An Actor Prepares*. He is arguably the most famous teacher of acting in contemporary theatre, and his influence on “The Method” has laid the groundwork for some of the most notable performances of the past century. His teachings are also the groundwork that we work from at ETSU in our acting classes. As someone who found Stanislavski later in life, I found his teachings enormously helpful in getting me out of my own head. As mentioned before, I am a chronic overthinker and, though I don’t see that as a weakness, it is something that can limit my work if I am not careful. In this step of the rehearsal process, when I am putting the monologue up on its feet, the goal is less to start setting it in stone, and more to explore the ideas and discoveries I had made while doing the bookwork, while also staying receptive enough to learn more about the character and the piece from living in the given situation. The seven questions presented earlier, as well as my high school lesson about perspective, are both indicative of this practice. This is where the real work starts to happen. Let’s use this monologue as a means of introducing this idea. First, let’s answer the seven questions that can be gathered through bookwork:

- Who am I? I am Peter, a high school cheerleader.
- Where am I? I am sitting on the bleachers after school with two female cheerleaders.
- What time is it? Afternoon.
- What do I want? To be seen for who I am. To be understood.
- Why do I want it? Because I don’t feel connected to the people around me.
- How will I get what I want? By showing them my perspective.

- What must I overcome to get what I want? The image that people already have of me.

After answering those questions, I would then be able to start working through the monologue, making notes about possible discoveries along the way, but always coming back to those seven questions. When talking about the context of the piece, this is what we are referring to. Now, I could continue to work this monologue as is and it could live a wonderful life, but, for myself, I know that I can change the context a bit to make it more fitting for me as an audition piece. This is called, “upping the stakes.” By making the scene more personal to me, I can better utilize the monologue to showcase my abilities as an actor. So, in this case, let’s change the context of the monologue.

- Who am I? I am Hunter, a gay college student.
- Where am I? In my apartment’s living room with my best friend.
- What time is it? 8:30pm, late enough for it to be dark outside.
- What do I want? For him to know that I love him.
- Why do I want it? Because I feel like I’m lying to him by not telling him.
- How will I get what I want? By being honest with him about my feelings.
- What must I overcome to get what I want? The fear of him rejecting me, possibly to the point of never talking to me again.

Taking in what I have disclosed about myself as the subject so far, it is easy to tell, in comparison, how this context digs deeper than the previous one. This is due to a few reasons. Firstly, there is a clearer idea of how the questions draw a connection between the person I am talking to and myself. This creates a deeper emotional connection for myself because the specificity hits in a way that is more than just logical, but in a way that makes me *feel* something.

This is helpful for myself because I can stop thinking and follow the trail my emotions are leading me to take. Secondly, because there is a deeper connection to the person I am speaking to, the monologue becomes something to be used to get what I want. Suddenly, the words are not just the lines of a character I am imagining but, instead, they become tools for me to get what I want. I become a vessel for the monologue to take a true life.

Through the help of my professors, I have discovered that it is beneficial to think of these questions as a diving block of sorts. You do all of this book work beforehand to understand the circumstances that you have been placed in, then you use the information available to pursue your objective. The more specific the situation is to you as an actor, the larger the range of possibility. I know we have all had an argument with someone where we thought of something clever to say way later in the day. Well, this is a working example of that. By envisioning a situation that we have been a part of, we can then apply how we felt and what we wanted to do and say to the scene. I think Uta Hagen, one of the most recognized acting teachers of the late 20th century, put it best in her book *Respect for Acting*, when she said, “It’s not about losing yourself in the role. It’s about finding yourself in the role.” I also feel that this quote is applicable to the third stage of the audition process.

VI. Why: What is my Voice?

Discovering your voice as an artist is something that can take a long time. It certainly has for me. When it comes down to it, if your type is who you are and your technique is what you are doing, I think that voice is why you’re doing it. It is the reason you choose to go to a late rehearsal after dinner and the motivation that picks you up after your 99th rejection. It is also how you talk about yourself and the work you’ve done alongside the work you want to do. I don’t believe we have complete control of our voice because, similar to type, there are some things

about ourselves that we had no choice in taking part in. However, I do believe that we can use our stories as a means of doing things no one has before, as a means of telling others it is okay to have their own aspirations. Voice then becomes less about “How do I shout?” and more about “What am I shouting?”

One of my biggest inspirations when I found the theatre was Neil Patrick Harris. The first Tony Awards Show that I watched was in 2014 where Neil won the Tony award for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance as the titular role in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. At this point in my life I had already come out of the closet to my friends and family with a mixture of reactions, so seeing his rocking out on national television in a wig and heels gave me some hope that I would find my place in the world. From that performance I became obsessed with YouTube videos of Tony Performances, especially that of Neil hosting the 67th Tony Awards in 2013. The main theme of the opening number “Bigger” centered around the Tony Awards’ return to Radio City Music Hall, and with Lin Manuel Miranda on the writing team, the performance was bound to be a success. Though I recommend anyone who has not seen it to go and watch it, there is a particular section of lyrics that has sat close to my heart since hearing it for the first time. I’ve included some of the surrounding lyrics for some extra detail and delight.

(Singing/Rapping)

At the end of the day we are gathered together to honor the best and the brightest
 And tomorrow the fashion police will report on your dress and who wore it the tightest
 If you win have the time of your life
 Tell your manager, dad, and your mom, “Thanks”
 Hi to your kids and your husband or wife
 Maybe just for the hell of it, Tom Hanks!

Nothing is bigger and better than seeing a veteran get an ovation
 or seeing a brilliant beginner freak out on a win for their first nomination
There’s a kid in the middle of nowhere sitting there, living for Tony performances singin’ and flippin’ along with the Pippins and Wicked and Kinkys, Matildas and Mormonses

So we might reassure that kid

and do something to spur that kid
Cause I promise you all of us up here tonight
We were that kid and now we're bigger

(Singing)
 Tonight it's bigger
 So let's create the biggest spectacle we know!

(Segal 5:45)

These lyrics instilled a sense in me that, no matter what I did, I had to become a representative for someone else. Back then, though, I thought it was just going to be that I was an openly gay actor in the industry. While I still know that that is a part of my story and my activism as an artist, I am also lucky enough to say that many members of the LGBTQ+ community have found their way into the spotlight to continue the fight for equality in America. The recognition of these other celebrities in the community made me realize that I had other parts to my identity than just being gay, and that I these would become just as much a part of my story as being gay is.

Since the diagnosis of my Hashimoto's Disease, I have tried to live my life to the extent that I knew I hadn't been before. My circus training is a huge testament to that mentality, the belief that I should be living my life to the fullest and pushing the limits my body can withstand. Though this training has come with more bruises and injuries than I'd like to say, it has also reaffirmed my belief in my abilities as a human. If I were to name three of my strengths as a person, they would be my want to help and support, my drive to never give up, and my love for the human condition, in both its highs and lows. Where do each of these strengths come from? Well, the want to help and support most likely comes from when I've been able to overcome something from being helped in the past, the drive probably comes from the lessons I've learned even when failing along the way, and the love comes from knowing first-hand what those highs

and lows feel like and what happens when one is ignored. Now, I know I have more strengths than that (and many weaknesses for that matter), but what I want to demonstrate is a confidence in my story to the point of being able to paint a picture fairly quickly. This is the voice I'm talking about, the story that is told through our sheer existence as people. In an audition setting (more specifically, in auditions for companies and universities) these are things that need to be just as clear in one's head as the circumstances of their monologue.

In an audition, the connection between the circumstances a person has gone through and the objective of a monologue is what ends up making a character. The little details being implemented (as mentioned before in the painting metaphor) come from a place of experience and knowledge of the world. If you have ever seen a children's production of a show, you will understand this greatly. It is not just skill, but also experience, that aids in the creation of life onstage. The reason I am emphasizing this is because, in every major audition I have had, there has been a callback of some sort where questions about me as a person have popped up, and the clear vision I have of myself (both my feats and my failures) is what got me closer to those contracts. This clear vision is an outward example people can see that indicates that we might have good work. It is a conundrum that introverted actors (like myself) find ourselves in because we aren't as comfortable putting ourselves out there as our extroverted castmates. This makes acting as a profession more difficult to get into, but, as I heard from Audition Coach Christine Horn on the Actor CEO Podcast, "You can't be a secret and a success." (Moreno 9:07) So, these qualities about ourselves are something that aren't just to get to know us as people but, also, to understand where we are coming from as actors. This opportunity is also a chance to save ourselves when the audition wasn't perfect.

Not every audition is going to go as well as we would like it, but my fingers are crossed not for a contract (though that's our end goal) but instead for a callback, where I can show off the parts of myself not exhibited in those 60 seconds. It is one of the possible answers for why the most talented people sometimes don't get work: because directors want to enjoy and trust who they are working with. Though I can only speak to a certain extent to why I have booked certain contracts in the past, I do know that the ones where I made a personal connection with the casting director were the ones that typically went better. Just like friendship, this can't be forced, as much as it would make things easier. However, it is something that can be played into when in the room.

Knowing your reason for acting is not just a tool to get a contract. It is also a tool to find out what companies YOU want to work with. As much as we are scrambling for jobs in the acting industry, it behooves us as actors to know what ideals the companies we are auditioning for align with. This dually helpful, as we would be auditioning for companies who we could potentially be a perfect fit for and because we can put more energy into an audition where the company may want *us* more! Similar with analyzing auditions for who we would be the right fit for casting wise, if we know a company does a lot of activism in and out of the theatre in areas we specialize in, we become a stronger candidate for them because they know they are putting their eggs in a basket that has experience in the work they care about. It is a mutual relationship between actor and company that has to be viewed from our side as much as theirs.

One example I found of this instance was in attending an information session with Feld Entertainment, producers of such well known shows as Marvel Universe Live!, Jurassic World Live!, Sesame Street Live!, The Trolls Experience, Disney on Ice, and more. In attending the session, I learned that one of the ways they participate in the communities they are in is by

reaching out to local hospitals who 3D print prosthetic limbs for children. The technology on these limbs allows them to be printed with superhero designs, such as Spiderman and Iron Man. Feld will send actors in their city to go to these hospitals and present these limbs to the children receiving them. The work they described was centered around providing experiences for the families that come to see their shows, which was an ideal that I didn't realize I aligned with until I met them. Though My training is not specifically aimed at working with them (at least, at the moment), I was able to identify a type of community activism that I wanted to do through theatre which was then brought into my interviews with potential graduate school programs. Again, it took some time to for me to find this part of my voice, the one that wanted to encourage kids to chase their dreams, but once I found it, I was able to implement it into my job search.

VII. Who, What, Why: Representative Work

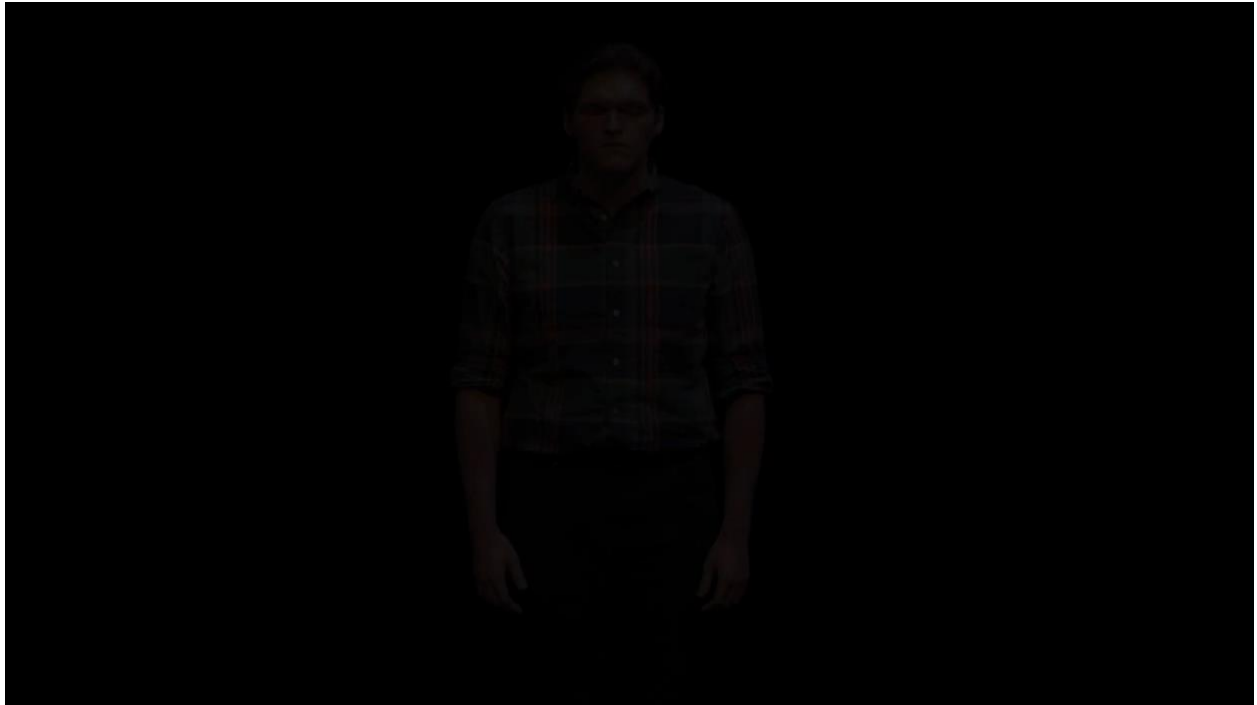
Though Voice is very much about what we are saying in literal conversation, it is also about what our representative work says about us. The work represented on our resume and through our audition material gives a pretty good idea of who we are as individuals just as much as how we talk about ourselves. Coincidentally, it also says a lot about our Type and Craft. Though each section can be and has been broken apart to analyze individually, it is important to put them back together at the end to get a full picture of who this person is. One way to look at all three is to watch them audition.

Let's take a look at one of my audition packages and see what we can take note of from it. (The video should play after double-clicking, if not, [this link](#) will take you to YouTube):



After watching this monologue, a couple of things stand out to me in each category. Off first glance, I get a bit of a modern day, robin hood vibe emanating from the facial hair, with a fun tone coming from the shirt. In terms of type, I'm reading this as happy goofball. Watching the monologue, I am laughing at the situation a lot and appreciating the vocal qualities and physicality. There are some stutters here and there with the words, but they seem to go with the monologue, so it doesn't bother me too much. The monologue selection tells me that this person has a good sense of humor, while also touching on a great bit of sensitivity at the end. Though it is difficult for me to judge categorically because I have been on the inside, overall, I am reading this audition as someone going out for romantic comedies.

Let's look at another example ([YouTube Link](#)):



This monologue adds new range to the performer I saw before. Though the clothing is the same (outside of a belt and some earrings) the hair change gives me someone younger than before. The boyish face makes me believe this is someone who can be hurt more easily. The piece itself is not as loud as the first (though this piece has been done in a louder way), this tells me that this person has camera quality as well as a softer side that we didn't see in the first piece. In terms of piece selection, there appears to be a deeper aspect to this actor, coming from a place of not belonging as was related in the monologue. This raises questions for me as a casting director that this person has some sort of a story, which makes me want to call them back to learn more about them and their range. Hopefully with these examples, it is easier to practice identifying some of the techniques and terminology that I have discussed in this format.

VIII. Conclusion

This self-reflection on what I have learnt and what I am learning has provided me with successful results in the audition world during my undergraduate career. Though many things remain out of my control, the implementation of this technique has provided me with a better means of gauging how I am developing as a professional in the acting industry. As it is an industry of unpredictability, my hope with this method is to maintain strength in my sense of self so as not to get beaten down from things that I have already recognized are out of my control. I have a sense of my type, I have trained in my craft, and I know my voice. There will be many times where the cards are not in my favor and there is nothing that this method can do for that. However, with diligence in attending auditions, and making smart choices within the factors I have control over, I, Hunter Thomas, the actor, can successfully create a career for myself in this industry.

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